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THE NATIVES OF HAWAII: A STUDY OF
POLYNESIAN CHARM.

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The eastern or brown Polynesian race, the Savaioris as they have been called, to distinguish them from other Oceanic races, have very definite characteristics, physical and mental. They are most nearly related to the Cambojan group, "their true affinities being with the Caucasians of Indo-China" (Keane). They are in no way, however distantly, related to the negro. Their habitat is in the southern and eastern Pacific Ocean, where they occupy Samoa, Tahiti, Tonga, the Marquesas, Tuamotu, Tokelau, Ellice, Rotuma, New Zealand, the eastern Fijis, Tarawa, Manega, Phoenix and Lagoon Islands, Easter Island, and in the north Pacific the Hawaiian group.

In all these islands and groups, however widely separated geographically, we find a people that is essentially one in blood, language, usages, traditions and religion. They rank high among races. Keane says: "They are one of the finest races of mankind, Caucasian in all essentials; distinguished by their symmetrical proportion, tall stature, aver-

aging five feet ten inches, and handsome features. Cook gives the palm to the Marquesas islanders, 'who for fine shape and regular features surpass all other natives.''' Lord George Campbell remarks: "There are no people in the world who strike one at first so much as these Friendly Islanders [Tongans]. Their clear, light copper-brown colored skins, yellow and curly hair, good-humored and handsome faces,—their *tout ensemble* formed a novel and splendid picture of the *genus homo*; and as far as physique and appearance go they gave one certainly an impression of being a superior race to ours." The Savaioris are similarly described by most of the leading observers. They are also among the kindest, most gentle-mannered and generous people in the world, and but for the oppressions of their priests and kings would have been the happiest.

What are the causes of this exceptional development? Under what conditions, material and psychical, has that development taken place? Only the briefest answer can be attempted here, and that only for one typical group, the Hawaiian. Some of the main conditions of this development were the following:

1. *Geography, orography.*—The largest island, Hawaii, has an area of four thousand square miles; the group stretches four hundred miles from northwest to southeast, and all the principal islands had rival kings. Frequent wars, naval excursions and invasions were the result. The islands are all mountainous, offering secure fastnesses to the contending factions, and the ancient Hawaiians developed a good fighting physique.

2. *Climate.*—The Hawaiian climate is the most equable tropical climate in the world. It is never, as in other tropical islands, excessively hot. The usual range of temperature is from 70° to 80° Fah.; at the sea level it never falls below 55° Fah., nor does it ever exceed 90°. Hurricanes and typhoons are absolutely unknown. This uniformity and this immunity are due to an ocean current from the

north, which tempers the winds and laves the island coasts in an ever-flowing stream at a temperature of about 70°.

The innocent Hawaiian climate favored the habit of outdoor life, which was almost universal, the native huts being used only for sleeping places and for protection from the rain. It also developed aquatic and seagoing habits. The nearness of the islands to each other, the gentle winds, the sea, never violently tempestuous, though often rough, these made the natives the most powerful and daring swimmers in the world, trained them in fishing and seagoing, and tempted them away on long ocean voyages—as far as to the Society Islands, 2,000 miles to the southward. In fishing, too, they became great experts.

3. The *soil* was in large part fertile. This, with the favoring climate, made but a few weeks' labor in the year necessary. The natives did not exert themselves toilsomely in agriculture. Their principal food was the root of the taro; this being nearly all starch, it produced great obesity, especially in the chiefs, who, having much to eat and not much to do, grew excessively fat.

4. *Negative Conditions*.—The total absence of wild beasts and noxious vermin, as well as of destructive tempests and temperatures, was favorable to the psychical development and the genial content of the islanders. Nature had no terrors for them; even the great volcanic eruptions of Mauna Loa and Kilauea, exceeding in magnitude all others on record, were very seldom destructive of human life; nor did the violent earthquakes do more than jostle the grass cottages of the dwellers in this lotos land.

The Hawaiians thus enjoyed, in the main, very peaceable conditions of existence. They were indeed harassed by the tabu and by the wars of their chieftains; but the struggle for life, as known in more densely populated countries, was not known to them. They found time for some forms of culture. They had no plastic art; metals were unknown, and they never attained more than a limited skill in mechani-

cal arts: but in poetry there was an interesting development, in the form of sonorous chants or *meles* couched in a peculiar poetic diction; in these were embodied the exploits and the lives of their heroes, as well as their traditions, mythology, and even their astronomical, botanical and animal lore.

They had a very acute eye for nature. Their language is full of terms for all visible things and doings; but it was little capable of expressing general conceptions, such as time, goodness, temperance, virtue; thus there were many synonyms for rain and sunlight, calm and storm, but no word for weather. This deficiency caused much trouble to the missionaries in the task of translating the Scriptures into the native tongue. The things most valued by the natives in old times were the sticks of Oregon pine, which at long intervals came drifting to the islands from the northwest coast, and were eagerly seized to be fashioned into war canoes. It is said that when the translator came to the passage in the Epistles, reading: "Add to your faith knowledge, and to your knowledge temperance, and to your temperance virtue," he appealed to his native assistant for the Hawaiian word for virtue, which he described as the most desirable of all possessions. The native was puzzled; neither the conception of virtue, as we understand it, nor any corresponding word, existed in Hawaiian; but at last he said: "I understand you now," and gave the missionary a word which made the passage read: "Add to your faith knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance a stick of Oregon pine."

Here then we have a community under most favoring conditions for happiness, a good climate and soil, an abounding sea, and freedom from the terrors of nature. Supported by a few days' labor in the month, the natives had leisure to cultivate poetry, dancing, games, and the social pleasures, together with the virtues of kindness, courtesy, and generosity. "The social and family affections," says Fornander,

“were as strong in the old Hawaiians as in any modern people, Christian or pagan.” They divided their possessions with their friends, and took pleasure in doing it. Lazy and greedy persons were not wholly unknown among them; but they had their punishment—they were stigmatized by such terms as *hoapili mea ai*, a friend for the sake of a dinner.

Briefly, here were a happy people. And why? Because they were exempt from the régime of competition—there was food for all; in time of peace at least there was no struggle for life. But why, again, was this? why this exemption from the usual fate of man?

The usual answer is that which we may seem to have given already—the fertile soil, the genial climate, the abounding sea, the entire absence of noxious natural forces. But this, like other usual answers, explains nothing; it is no answer at all. In countries like Java, Ceylon, and large parts of India and China we find natural conditions not indeed absolutely so favorable as these, yet nearly so; but these are the very countries that have suffered terribly from overcrowding and famine. In Hawaii the conditions are those which elsewhere have produced over-population, and its resulting degradation; yet in Hawaii there was no over-population; although they had their hard times they had no destructive famines. During the nineteen years of my residence there, there were sometimes shortages in the taro and sweet potato crops; the natives went into the woods, and dug up a kind of fern that had a succulent, starchy root, and with this and a little fish they eked out an existence; but destructive famines are not in their record.

What then is the explanation of the Polynesian immunity from the struggle for life, and from the misery and debasement that accompany it? Why were not these islands crowded, like countries under the old civilizations, with millions of people whose entire energies are spent in the effort to earn, not a living, but half a living or less?

The data for the answer have long been before the student,

yet the true answer as I think has not yet been given. The ancient Hawaiian's exemption from the struggle for life, and the effect of this exemption on his character, were not due to climate, or to soil, or to any physical conditions; none of these things gave the Samoan, the Tahitian, the Tongan, Hawaiian, his joyous temperament, his winning manners, his generous heart.

Throughout Polynesia the struggle for life was evaded by restricting the natural increase of population. By this restriction the population was kept down to the means of comfortable subsistence; there was food enough for all; the community lived under no economic stress; and in consequence it attained, as we have seen, this remarkable development of genial and generous traits and of material happiness.

Now this has a direct illustrative bearing, as it seems to me, on the greatest of social problems—the lessening of human suffering, the augmentation of human happiness. No sane thinker would advocate a resort to the barbarous and wasteful infanticide of the Polynesians; but in all overpopulated communities to-day, and throughout the world in the not distant future, the great question must be this: How to limit the mere quantity, and how to improve the quality of the population.

To some this problem seems to lack actuality, as long as any corner of the world remains uncrowded; and emigration is proposed as a cure. But, in the first place, emigration on a sweeping scale is an impossibility. Imagine the population of a great city being called upon to emigrate; where are the means to come from? What would become of the people if deported in masses? Few of them could attach themselves to the soil. In a word, the relief of emigration is not feasible except on a limited scale; for more reasons than one, it is impossible in a majority of cases. But suppose emigration were possible. How long would the relief thus given endure? Only for a few years. As commonly after wars and famines, the population would

spring up more rapidly than before, and the gap would soon be filled. Neither in the old world nor the new has the poverty of crowded cities ever been cured by emigration.

Now consider other schemes of alleviating misery, poverty, crime; put any other theory of reform to the test, and you meet the same difficulty. Some theorists regard a better education as a cure-all; some would seek relief in improved legislation, others in a better knowledge of the laws of health; others in finding employment for the poor, in wisely directed charities; others say in morals, the Sermon on the Mount; others in religion, culture, philosophy. All of these are good and desirable, but none of them touch the essential point; none would prevent the overcrowding of the poorer population. Suppose any of these reforms actually carried out. Would any of them, would all of them together, materially check the multiplication of the unfit? The eternal law of Malthus survives; its cruel action is little hindered by any of the popular philanthropies. They have been ineffectual in the past, they will be found ineffectual in the future. The only effective relief of human suffering will be found in checking the multiplication of the unfit—in the intelligent limiting of mere numbers, and the consequent improvement of quality. It is the most difficult of reforms, because both State, Church, and popular opinion (especially among men), are against it, yet it is a problem that grows in importance with each new generation. The restriction of population in France, while it is disadvantageous as long as a nation's virtue is measured by the size of its armies, is a step in the right way.

The reform that is most needed in the world is one of a distant future; it is to look for quality, not mere quantity of life, and to put humane and scientific checks upon over-population. Only in this way will the cruel struggle for existence ever be lessened; only thus will future generations suppress poverty, disease and crime, the vicious circle which is the despair of civilization.

At the conclusion of Dr. Coan's address the following colloquy took place between him and persons in the audience:

DR. MARTIN: Has that restriction of population to the means of subsistence in the islands been continued?

DR. COAN: No. Since the islands have passed under modern civilization, the condition which I mentioned no longer exists. For other reasons the native population is not increasing, but there is no longer that artificial restriction. Indeed, the native government of no long time ago encouraged the raising of large families.

MR. MCGIBBONEY: I have a friend who spent a number of years in Hawaii, who says they not only have no name for sexual virtue, but none of the principles of virtue. Is that true?

DR. COAN: Technically that would be true. That is to say, the Polynesian idea of virtue is different from ours. Some one has said that virtue in Polynesia was regarded as an elegant accomplishment, but not as a necessity.

MR. MCGIBBONEY: Did that circumstance cause the decrease in population since the arrival of the whites?

DR. COAN: I would not say that was the cause; it was due, as Darwin has pointed out, to infertility resulting from changed conditions of living. But the point that Mr. Darwin inquired about was regarding the prevalence of infanticide, and whether male or female children were more frequently sacrificed.

MR. CROXTON: I would like to ask if the present decrease, or lack of increase of population, is not partly chargeable to their having put on clothing?

DR. COAN: Undoubtedly; that was one of their changed conditions of living. The mischief came about in two ways. The docile natives were delighted with the idea of wearing clothes, and nothing gave them more pleasure than the bright-colored calico prints; these would not wash, so they would throw them off when the rain came down, and run into the church half-naked, or more than half, and nobody thought

anything of it. But they wore their clothes quite irregularly; their skins became tender, and, they were constantly catching cold. In my father's great church there was often such a tempest of coughing and sneezing that you could hardly hear his strong voice. Another vice of the clothes-wearing habit was that the natives would not take off their garments when they got wet, and illness resulted from that cause. Epidemics of small-pox, measles, influenza, decimated the people. *Pax vobiscum*, said the priest to the native; *pox vobiscum*, said the sailor and trader. Yet these diseases were not the essentially destructive agencies; they are not now more prevalent there than elsewhere, and the climate is exceptionally healthy. The passing away of the Hawaiians and of the other Polynesians was inevitable from the moment that the first European visitor stepped under the coconut groves. The island character, with its faults, its follies, and its charms, is disappearing under the total régime of the white man. Not until the world shall learn how to limit the quantity and how to improve the quality of races will future ages see any renewal of such idyllic life and charm as that of the ancient Polynesian.